



Central California Area Maritime Security Committee

Port security put to the test.

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The fishing vessel *Mary Lou* has set out for a day of fishing. Suddenly, there is an explosion, and the boat quickly sinks in flames. Emergency crews race to the scene and find the area saturated by mines. The first true test of the newly formed Central California Area Maritime Security Committee (AMSC) was underway. This event signaled the start of the Lead Shield/Rogue exercise—a full-scale antiterrorism exercise, developed to test the committee’s ability to form a unified command and respond effectively to a large-scale terrorist attack.

Central California Area Maritime Security Committee

The Central California AMSC was established in February 2004, as mandated by the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002. The committee’s mission is to advise the federal maritime security coordinator on the identification of critical port infrastructure and operations, risks, and mitigation strategies and methods. The committee also advises on the development of a continuous overall port security evaluation process that includes contingency plan development and dissemination of maritime security-related information to port stakeholders. The executive steering committee is composed of 15 voting members and six nonvoting members and encompasses a wide spectrum of government agencies, port operators, labor unions, political representatives, and other maritime community members.

With such a diverse membership, a process-oriented structure is a critical component for success. The National Incident Management System/Incident Command System, as developed by the California Department of Forestry, was chosen by the executive steering committee to give this organization the framework to function as both a prevention and a response entity. This concept has proved successful for decades as a means of



Figure 1: An aerial view of the port of Los Angeles-Long Beach.

effectively unifying the efforts of numerous agencies. It enables the AMSC to put into place a system of continuous improvement that utilizes lessons learned from exercises and actual responses.

The committee is a collaborative effort, with membership from all aspects of the port community; it truly is an area committee. The Coast Guard chairs this dynamic committee and has guided the group from the critical inception stage and continues to work closely with myriad port stakeholders to maintain an atmosphere of ownership and partnership. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) serves as the vice-chair of this committee. This is a huge benefit, as it gives the committee ready access to a wide range of federal criminal investigative and intelligence services. The combined leadership and expertise the Coast Guard and FBI bring to the committee provide a strong regulatory foundation and response expertise to handle any number of security-related challenges that face the Port of Los Angeles–Long Beach (Figure 1).

The committee is composed of four sections in accordance with the ICS structure: operations, finance/administration, logistics, and planning/intelligence. Each of these sections is chaired by a voting member agency. The operations section is chaired by the Los Angeles Police Department; the finance/administration section is chaired by the California Office of Emergency Services; the logistics section is chaired by the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department; and the planning/intelligence section is chaired by Immigration & Customs Enforcement. Enthusiastic acceptance of this organizational structure inspired the Transportation Security Administration to copy the model and form a similar committee that addresses security challenges at Los Angeles International Airport.

The Central California AMSC meets on a quarterly basis to discuss ongoing security initiatives, the progress of grants within the port complex, and future multi-agency exercises. Motions for actions and activities must be passed by a majority of the present voting executive steering committee. In addition, the committee has hosted numerous distinguished guest speakers, such as then-Department of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, Senator Diane Feinstein,



Figure 2: Dolphins were used in exercise Lead Shield/Rogue to detect mines.

Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, and acclaimed homeland security expert and author Steve Flynn.

Testing the System

Although the committee is less than two years old, it has already been tested under two major exercises: Determined Promise '04 and Lead Shield/Rogue (Figures 2, 3, and 4). During the latter full-scale exercise, for the first time, the Central California AMSC functioned as the core of a unified command. This gave numerous port stakeholders the opportunity to be a



Figure 3: Mobile command post for exercise Lead Shield/Rogue.

part of the readiness process from the initial planning stage to the "hot wash." The experience enlightened port stakeholders to the fact that response is the applied portion of prevention. This new perspective on this process infused the numerous Central California AMSC members with enthusiasm for making their port complex the best prepared in the country.

Another key benefit of the AMSC is that all plans and documents that are produced by the organization are truly team efforts. The first plan was the Area Maritime Security Plan, which had the goal of

improving the safety and the security of the Los Angeles–Long Beach Port complex. This plan is an evolving document that lists all critical infrastructures and AMSC assets and provides important contact guidance within the AMSC hierarchy. In light of the highly criticized governmental responses to recent natural disasters, it was evident that there was a need to have a coordinated port evacuation plan.

In October 2005 the Central California AMSC held the first in a series of workshops that will help shape the focus and contents of a new AMSC port evacuation plan. The purpose of the first workshop was to identify the challenges faced by the port, regarding port evacuation,



Figure 4: Training for exercise Lead Shield/Rogue.

recovery, and reconstitution. The sector contingency planning staff consolidated the findings of this workshop and drafted a white paper that captured and organized a

wide variety of critical port concerns. The evacuation subcommittee will use this white paper to collaboratively develop a draft port evacuation plan that focuses on the safe and efficient evacuation of the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Once the port evacuation plan draft is complete, AMSC plans to test the plan during the upcoming PortStep tabletop exercise this summer. Refinements to the plan will be made based on the lessons learned during this exercise. This process exemplifies the Central California AMSC's desire to engage only in exercises that test a plan and have thorough metrics to measure performance, based on established criteria. Thus, lessons learned during the exercise are captured in a meaningful way, and area plans are continuously improved.

Real-Life Application

By working together during meetings, exercises, and

plan preparation, the AMSC member organizations have formed strong relationships with each other that will be invaluable during any major crisis requiring a coordinated response. The first few hours of any response effort are absolutely critical for first-responder coordination. Recently, the Central California AMSC engaged its joint coordination center (JCC) in response to the 2005 London terrorist attacks on mass transit. The JCC, similar to a crisis action center, is comprised of personnel from numerous first-responder agencies. It was designed to coordinate joint agency preventative security operations within the port complex during increased maritime security levels, or based on specific credible intelligence. Within hours of the London attack, the JCC quickly and efficiently coordinated increased waterside and landside patrols by a wide range of law enforcement agencies. The intelligence gathered by the patrols was rapidly presented to the AMSC through the FMSC. Without a doubt, the JCC has proven itself as a worthwhile security instrument that requires only a minor investment of resources.

Due to enormous media interest in the port complex, the AMSC proposed the formation of a public relations and joint information center subcommittee during the August 2005 quarterly meeting. Once established, this group will be composed of a cross section of member agency's public information officers. These personnel will work closely together to consistently provide press releases, interview coordination, and other vital public information services to the unified command and the media.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and recent natural disasters have taught us the importance of having senior local government leadership and first responders familiar with working together. The Area Maritime Security Committee concept has proven itself a very successful strategy. However, the strategy by itself is not enough. The reason this committee is so successful is due to its Incident Command System structure, excellent interagency communication, and teamwork.

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